Curios and Relics

Clothing Accessories

Cane - Assassination

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the

Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

71.2009.085.84894

Cane Carried by Lincoln When Shot, Now in N. Orleans

NEW ORLEANS, La.—The ebony cane carried by Abraham Lincoln the night he was assassinated has come to New Orleans along with swords of Lord Nelson, the great British admiral and Marshall Joffre, of France.

Their owner, S. J. Schwartz, declines to tell how he came into possession of the Nelson and Joffre swords but explains he purchased Lincoln's cane recently from Arthur L. von Dolcke, of Charlevoix, Mich. Dolke had received it from his father, who in turn had got it from a negro janitor of Ford's theater.

An affidavit accompanying the cane relates that the janitor found it in the theater box the night Lincoln was shot and had given it to Dr. von Dolcke of Washington.

The cane is a straigbt, black ebony stick curiously carved and inlaid and was treasured by the president as a gift from a group of friends. Just below the handle behind thick glass is "Abe Lincoln" then a carved heart and "rail splitter." Next are nine dots representing the nine states from which slavery was abolished. Beneath is a miniature carved log cabin, a likeness of Lincoln's birth place.

DUBUQUE IOWA AMER TRIB
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1929.

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor,
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 538 FORT WAYNE, INDIANA July 31, 1939

A GOLD-HEADED WALKING STICK

A shawl or a tall silk hat would probably be noted as features characterizing Abraham Lincoln, and often an old fashioned umbrella is placed beside the tall hat as a symbol of the prairie lawyer. For some reason, however, a walking stick which Lincoln is said to have used habitually does not seem to find any place in the Lincoln legend.

There has just come to light an interesting but rather obscure reminiscence which would imply that even from childhood Lincoln had been accustomed to carry some kind of a stick; in adult years this evolved into a cane. Possibly the old fashioned umbrella of the prairie years was, in Lincoln's hand, a happy transition from the primitive dogwood club to the more elaborate gold-headed cane of the Presidential years.

A Washington correspondent tells the story of a friend's visit to Abraham Lincoln, on which occasion Lincoln expressed himself on the use of walking sticks. Inasmuch as the reminiscence was printed in the month of May, 1865, it bears the imprint of truth. The subject was introduced by the fact that the visitor to Mr. Lincoln carried a cane. The President reached for it and then expressed himself as follows:

"I always used a cane when I was a boy. It was a freak of mine. My favorite one was a knotted beech stick, and I carved the head myself. There's a mighty amount of character in sticks. Don't you think so? You have seen these fishing poles that fit into a cane? Well, that was an old idea of mine. Dogwood clubs were favourite ones with the boys. I 'spose they use 'em yet. Hickory is too heavy, unless you get it from a young sapling. Have you ever noticed how a stick in one's hand will change his appearance? Old women and witches wouldn't look so without sticks. Meg Merrilees understands that."

It is difficult to learn when Lincoln began to carry a stick of such dignified appearance that it might be called a cane. In Miss Walker's interesting study at Vincennes of the Lincoln family's migration from Indiana to Illinois, her bronze Lincoln appears beside the yoke of oxen drawing the covered wagon with a goad in his hand. The ox goad might be called the primitive walking stick of the pioneer, as he often leaned upon it for support in much the same manner as the shepherd upon his staff, with the sharp point elevated in much the same fashion as the herdsman's crook. The cattle driver in the Kentucky country, even now, is seldom seen without his improvised goad, or stock cane.

There are many canes in existence which are said to have belonged to the President. A cane made of wood taken from the Henry Clay home was supposedly carried by Lincoln during the debates. One presented to Lincoln in 1860 was studded with fourteen knots, each knot mounted with a silver crown bearing a letter in Abraham Lincoln's name. There was the Broderick oak cane presented to Lincoln with great ceremony in 1863, and bearing its interesting inscriptions on gold plates. The assassination cane made of black ebony with its nine dots representing the states which had withdrawn from the Union, is said to have been left by Lincoln in the box at Ford's Theatre on the night of his assassination.

The most famous of his many walking sticks, however, was one presented to him by John A. McClernand in 1857. The McClernand stick is undoubtedly the one which he carried with him to Washington, and it finds a place in the First Inaugural picture. A contemporary account of Lincoln's appearance as he approached the platform on this eventful day is found in a press correspondent's description of him: "He was arrayed in a full suit of regulation black including a dress coat, a brand new silk hat, and a ponderous gold-headed cane. After standing hesitatingly a moment his cane in one hand and his hat in the other he got rid of the former by thrusting it up in the angle of the railing....."

After Lincoln's death this same gold-headed cane was presented to Dr. James Smith who was for seven years the spiritual adviser of the Lincoln family at Springfield, Illinois, and who was appointed by President Lincoln as United States Consul at Edinburgh, Scotland.

Harper's Bazaar for August 27, 1871 published a codicil from Dr. Smith's will which reads as follows:

"I give, devise and bequeath unto John Bright, Esq., member of the British House of Commons, and to his heirs the gold-mounted staff or cane which belonged to the deceased President Lincoln of the United States, and presented to me by the deceased's widow and family, as a mark of the President's respect, which staff is to be kept and used as an heirloom in the family of the said John Bright, as a token of the esteem which the late President felt for him because of his unwearied zeal and defense of the United States in suppressing the civil rebellion of the Southern States."

Through the courtesy of Harlan F. Burket, an attorney in Findlay, Ohio, the attention of the editor of Lincoln Lore was called to an excerpt from "The Life and Speeches of John Bright" which was published in 1881. It confirms the fact that the famous cane reached its proper destination, as we see by the following notation:

"But perhaps the most interesting reminiscence relating to Mr. Bright and the United States is one respecting which we are able to give the following particulars. The staff used by President Lincoln was bequeathed to Mr. Bright by the Rev. Dr. J. Smith of Springfield, Illinois, the latter having first received it from Mr. Lincoln's family. The President's gold-headed staff, or cane, bears the following inscription on the gold head: 'J. A. McClernand to the Hon. A. Lincoln, June 1857;' and on a gold ferule below are the words, 'Presented to Rev. Jas. Smith, D. D. late pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Ills. by the family of the late President Lincoln, in memoriam of the high esteem in which he was held by him and them as their pastor and dear friend, 27th April, 1868'. On another gold ferule, lower down, is the following: 'Bequeathed by the Rev. Dr. Smith, U. S. Consul, Dundee, to the Right Hon. John Bright, M. P. in recognition of his tried friendship to the United States' ".

It is interesting to know that on the mantle of the study in the White House at the time Lincoln was assassinated, there was displayed a portrait of John Bright. Certainly this famous cane found an appropriate home when it reached the hands of the distinguished English statesman who was ever in sympathy with the Union cause.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

November 30, 1954

Dr. Louis A. Warren
Director
Lincoln National Life Foundation
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Dr. Warren:

The Smithsonian Institution has recently received as a gift a hickory cane which is inlaid in silver or a very light brass, with the letters A - B - R - A - H - A - M L - I - N - C - O - L - N which spiral down the cane from the handle to the end. The silver letters are inlaid in the knots of the wood and between the two words are inlaid a small star, a hand with the index finger pointing down the cane, a crescent and a long oval on the front of the cane and an eagle on the inside. This cane came to us with the legend that it was owned and used by President Lincoln and was the one he was carrying on the night of his assassination. The cane was afterwards given by Mrs.Lincoln to a Mr. Job Winans Angus who was superintendent of the White House during the Lincoln administration. The cane came to us from a Washingtonian who got it from Mr. Angus.

Have you ever heard of Mr. Lincoln having such a cane or being given a cane of this kind? I feel sure it must have been made as a gift for him because of its elaborate decoration. Is there any known list of canes owned by Lincoln and is it known whether he habitually carried a cane?

Any information you can give me on this subject will be greatly appreciated. If you would like to have a photograph of the cane for your files, I will be glad to have one made for you.

Sincerely,

Margaret W. Brown

Margaret W. Brown
Associate Curator
Division of Civil History

Cane

December 3, 1954

Miss Margaret W. Brown
Associate Curator
Smithsonian Institution
United States National Museum
Washington, D. C.

My dear Madam:

You will please find attached to this note a copy of Lincoln Lore and a photostat which may give some information on the cane which you have written about. Whether or not the one reproduced by the photostat copy is similar to the one you have, I cannot determine but it bears a resemblance.

Very truly yours,

LAW/JLA
Enc.

Director

(1)

Yorktown Heights, New York
14 July 1958

R. Gerald McMurtry, Director
The Lincoln National Life Foundation
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Mr. McMurtry,

Am enclosing a clipping from last Saturday's Herald Tribune and the following which appeared in the PUTNAM COUNTY COURIER, 31 January 1880, published in Carmel, New York.

Chief Markham, of the detective force of Troy, recently discovered the cane of President Lincoln, which was possessed by a Frenchman from Baltimore, who came to Troy some time since. On the night of Lincoln's assassination, 14th of April, 1865, the cane was taken from the box in which the President was shot. The actor who took it afterwards pawned it for some drinks with the Frenchman, who then kept a saloon. The son of President Lincoln, Robert T., learned of the cane, and employed means to recover it. A search warrant was obtained, and the cane found as indicated. In the police court it was ordered returned to the rightful owner.

I thought these items, correct or not, might be of interest to you. The COURIER just recently came into my possession and when I saw the above I thought of you.

I have a copy of THE DAY MR. LINCOLN SPOKE AT GETTYSBURG put out by the Interlaken Mills and find it extremely interesting. Doubtless you have a copy as credit for it is partly given to you.

Will keep on the lookout for similar items for you.

Very truly yours,

John Gemmill

LINCOLN'S CANE

LINCOLN carried a silver headed, ebony cane to Ford's Theater the night he was assassinated. This fact is borne out by an actor, one Phelps by name, who was employed at Ford's Theater in Washington, D. C., on the night of April 14, 1865. During the excitement in the theater, following the assassination of President Lincoln, Phelps went to the President's box and found the cane in a corner where Lincoln had left it. He took it home with him as a memento.

Like many actors Phelps shortly became involved in a debt which he could not pay and he exchanged Lincoln's cane for an account which amounted to $40.00. Stephen Mayhew, the creditor of Phelps, treasured the cane as an authentic memento of the martryed president. After the fact was known that Mayhew owned the cane it was seized by the authorities and placed in a jeweler's safe until the owner could establish his rightful ownership.

Mr. Mayhew took legal action to recover the cane and engaged a lawyer, named Palmer. This attorney caused the cane to be sold at a Sheriff's sale and he bought it in for Mayhew so that he would have a clear title to the Lincoln relic. This litigation cost Stephen Mayhew between eighteen hundred ($1800.00) and two thousand ($2,000.00) dollars.

The cane remained in the owners possession until the year 1914 when he gave the relic to his son Joseph Mayhew. In 1929 this cane was presented to Lincoln Memorial University for the Lincoln collection.

The cane with an iron ferrule is of black ebony, 35½ inches long, with a sterling silver knob handle on the side of which is engraved in script, "A. Lincoln". It is displayed in a glass case and is considered one of the most interesting relics of the Lincoln collection.